

ALIGNMENT

INTRO

No matter how good your plan, how solid your intentions, or even how clear a picture you have of your team, your plan will not survive its first contact with reality. And that's okay. An alignment is designed to address this. It happens somewhere between 4 and 6 weeks into a project and should take between one and two hours. It will leave you with a set of prioritised actions, and a little (or a lot) less anxiety.

If you work in sprints, you can use an alignment as one of your retrospectives, since it fulfils a similar function:

- ☒ How are we doing?
- ☒ What are we doing well?
- ☒ What can we learn from?
- ☒ And how are we contributing to continuous improvement?

STEPS IN THIS SESSION

Time estimated:

3–5 participants = 2 hours

5–8 participants = 3 hours

1 Check-In

10 min. The check-in is a chance for the team to fully arrive, physically and mentally. [\(44\)](#)

2 Update Foundation Posters

15 min. This is a chance to talk about what's happened until now and how it compares with what was supposed to have happened. [\(46\)](#)

3 Mapping The Events

30 min. Things will have changed. Plans, even good ones, don't stand on their own, and external and internal factors can derail you. This is a chance to talk about the realities of the project. [\(48\)](#)

4 Start, Stop, Continue

20–30 min. Once you've talked about realities, what will you do about them? This is where you talk about what there should be more of, less of, and none of. [\(50\)](#)

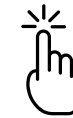
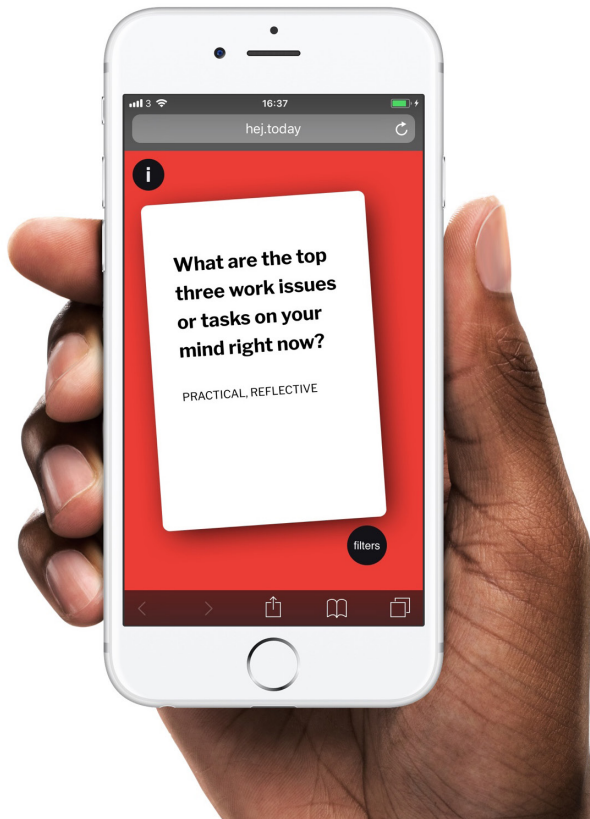
5 Priorities and Actions

20–30 min. If you don't prioritise the items you made above, you'll just get an increasingly long list of tweaks and changes. This is where you turn a potential snag list into a prioritised list of actions that will make everything smoother and the team happier. [\(52\)](#)

6 Feedback

15 min. Don't miss a chance to give and receive some feedback. It helps bond the team and ends the session on a high note. This is optional, but recommended. [\(54\)](#)

1. Check-In



SAY NO TO BULLIES

Some members, especially if they're unhappy or if the team has been stuck in a conflict stage, might express discontent or demonstrate a need to talk more about something that's bothering them. If that's the case, find a quiet moment to plan a time to talk further. Conversely, it can also be a time when bullying tendencies might come out, especially in subtle ways. If you spot blaming or passive-aggressive behaviours, address it immediately. In the group, ask the person to re-frame or rephrase their statement, and if this doesn't work, take it outside the group. For The Teamwork Kit process to work, there can't be any tolerance for bullying, even if it's from a position of unconscious bias or unaddressed power.

2. Update Foundation Posters



Time: 15 min.



Material: A4 papers, colourful pens

This is where you'll revisit the Foundation material and compare and contrast what you set out to do, and what you've actually been doing. You'll decide what to keep doing, where you need to right a wrong turn or meet an unexpected challenge or change, and what you need to start doing as a team or individually. Team members will also get a chance to update any individual goals if they've changed during the course of the project.

If not much has changed, this section will be a hygiene item you can check off in just a few minutes but it could take much longer if there have been a lot of challenges, changes, or updates. About a week before the Alignment takes place, assess the time block you booked for it back when you held your Foundation workshop and consider

if you need to change or add more time. Don't shorten the session, however – if you have extra time, spend longer on feedback.

What to do

- ⌂ Put the timeline, goals and deliverables posters, and team posters somewhere people can see them. Team members will arrive with some ideas about what's needed, but you can also give them five or so minutes to look at the material and refresh their memories.
- ⌂ Together, use the questions below to guide your discussion, and make sure you use some kind of time-boxing to keep things from derailing too much.
- ⌂ Has anything changed in the project since our last meeting, and if so, do we need to update the posters?
- ⌂ Are there elements that can be reframed or restated so that they are clear and actionable?
- ⌂ Is your team poster up-to-date? How are we each working on individual development goals, and is help needed from the team? Do these goals need to be adjusted?
- ⌂ If there's a new team member, help them fill out their Team Template in advance. Show them the materials the team has created so they get an understanding of how theirs should look. Make some space for them to ask questions and ask them supportive questions to ensure they don't feel too lost.
- ⌂ If someone has left the team, look together at their Team Template to make sure their duties have been redistributed correctly and make sure everyone's clear who has taken over what.

3. Mapping the Events



Time: 30 min.



Material: A4 papers, colourful pens

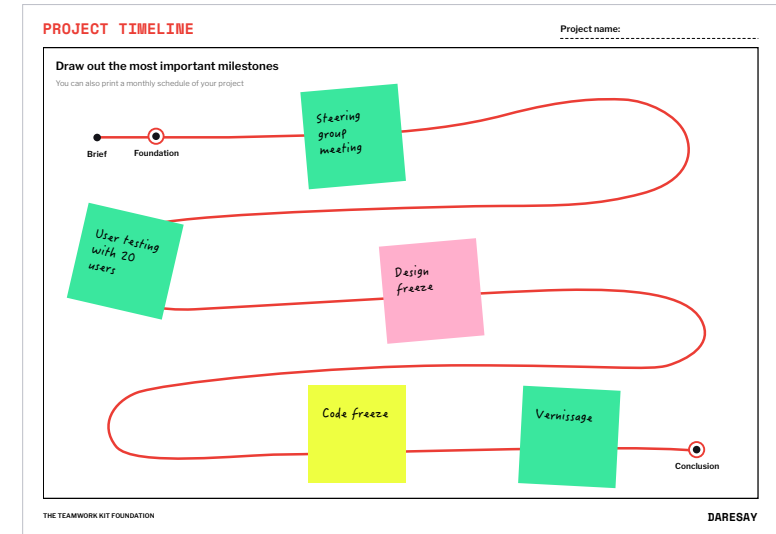
In this part of the session, you'll create a timeline with milestones that stand for key events during the time since the last meeting, as a way to discuss how things have gone so far, and start to make connections between activities, events, and the team's emotional experiences of the project. Then you'll decide what to start doing, stop doing, and continue with.

Timeline Exercise

This is where you'll review the project as it's gone so far, and discuss your experiences of it, to create a way forward that works for everyone and for the project.

What to do

- ⌚ Put the timeline on the wall or draw it on a whiteboard/flipchart if you don't have a timeline poster. If you've created it in advance, make sure the group agrees with the representation of events that you've shown.
- ⌚ Have each person add events that are individually relevant to them, working solo



Project Timeline poster

with a stack of stickynotes and adding them to the timeline as they go. These can be actual events, such as finally getting in touch with an elusive stakeholder, or moments of importance, such as when the problem finally started to seem clear.

⌚ Then have them create an 'emotional curve' of their personal experiences so far, and draw it on the timeline. Use different coloured pens for each participant, and label each line with the person's name.

⌚ If the team isn't clear about how to do this, or they have

difficulty opening up about the emotional part, offer your own first, and show a few good examples.

⌚ Then, spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing what the team has created. Make sure you time-box this and help the team stay on topic. It may be tempting to start going down rabbit holes, but it's important to prevent that. It might be best for you to go through the stickynotes yourself and ask people for clarifications or details as you go, rather than have each person present their contribution.

4. Start, Stop, Continue



Time: 30 min.



Material: A4 papers, colourful pens

Here's where you'll take a few minutes to translate your activities, challenges, successes and emotional experiences into a way forward. The result will be a list of things that will be a mixture of the practical, such as "We should work harder to start our meetings on time" and the emotional, like, "We should continue paying attention to the value of praise feedback."

What to do

- ④ Use the template provided or just draw three columns on a whiteboard or flipchart, labelling them "Stop," "Start," and "Continue."
- ④ Show them some examples, either from the sample poster below, or from a past project within the organisation.
- ④ Ask team members to write their contributions on stickynotes – as usual, one statement per stickynote – and stick them in the relevant column on the whiteboard. Where there are duplicates, they can feel free to group them as they go.

START, STOP, CONTINUE	
Start <small>Specific suggestions about how we could proceed from now on</small> <div>More alignment sessions</div>	Stop <small>What we should stop doing - that is harmful for collaboration or project</small> <div>Stop arriving late at meetings</div> <div>Have long unnecessary meetings</div>
	Continue <small>What is working well and should be mentioned</small> <div>Feedback Fridays</div> <div>Close collaboration</div>

THE TEAMWORK KIT FOUNDATION DARESAY

Start, Stop, Continue Poster

5. Priorities and Actions



Time: 30 min.



Material: A4 papers, colourful pens

Now you'll spend a few minutes going over the contributions and turning them into actions. You may have a few dozen contributions in a large team, so pay special attention to prioritisation, to avoid adding too many new factors. You'll start to notice patterns emerging, so prioritise those and make a list of actions. You may also see a need to realign team responsibilities or shift schedules.

What to do

▶ An experienced team might have clustered their contributions as they went along. If they haven't, you can do that now. Cluster them yourself or invite the team to help, giving them a chance to see what others have written.

▶ If there are patterns emerging, team members are likely to agree on what they are, but they may not agree on what should be done about them.

Take a few minutes to discuss them, and try sticker voting if you need help with priorities.

▶ Make a list of things to start doing, stop doing, and continue doing. Teams almost always want more clarity and more feedback, so if you haven't scheduled feedback for the end of this workshop, take a minute to get one into the calendar, or do an impromptu one later in the day, perhaps over a coffee.

6. Feedback (optional)



Time: 15 min.



Material: A4 papers, colourful pens

We say this is optional because if you've had a lot of changes in the project, the team might just want to end the meeting and get back to work. It would be wonderful if everyone had the time to give each other positive and constructive feedback, but reality is messy, and you don't want this to feel rushed. But feedback is extremely important in strengthening the bonds between members, and adding it to sessions helps people get into good feedback habits outside of workshops and meetings.

What to do

▶ If you have a large group, do feedback in small groups, and try to either divide them arbitrarily, or, if you've had a lot of frustrations, spread the 'cheerleader' personalities across the groups.

▶ Use the templates in the Feedback section, or try your own by asking a

specific question, like, "What is one characteristic the other person has that you wish you had more of yourself?"

Or, "What do you think the other person brings to the project that no one else can?"

▶ Let them take a few minutes to think – not everyone can

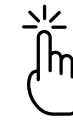
come up with specific feedback on the spot – and write their feedback on stickynotes.

⌂ If the group is relatively experienced together, you can go around and share in the large group.

⌂ If they're fairly new or still not totally comfortable with each other or with Feedback sessions, let them share among themselves.

⌂ Take the most positive stickynotes and hang onto them, so they can be brought out again later. It might even be fun to bring them out at the Conclusion and see if the team can remember who the subject was for each one.

⌂ A more mature group can handle constructive criticism, but critical feedback is easier to take in when there's a relationship of trust. If the team is in a conflict stage, keep things focused on positivity and praise only. You can dial up critical feedback as the group matures, but always make sure there are more positives than negatives.



TIME CRUNCH

If the first section of your alignment was longer than planned, you may feel time is too tight to do a Feedback session. But resist the temptation to cut it out entirely, especially if the team identified a need for more feedback. If you're pressed for time, try an abbreviated session. For example, have team members give structured praise feedback in pairs or groups of 3, publicly or individually.